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SUBJECT: STRATEGIES TO RENEW THE HAITI SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR
MANDATE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The "Group of Friends" of the Haiti mandate of the Human Rights Council met to address their concerns that some countries might seek to scale back or eliminate that mandate when it comes up for renewal in the Council. The Group members focused on gaining the support of the GoH for the mandate, and saw good relations between Port-au-Prince and the new mandate holder, Michel Forst, as vital. For his part, Forst has, for the moment, taken a cautious approach toward his mandate. Several Group members agreed that they would begin lobbying to renew the mandate in hopes of ensuring its renewal and making it as strong as possible. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Looking to lay the groundwork for next year's planned renewal of the mandate on the human rights situation in Haiti and to begin working with the recently selected special rapporteur on Haiti, Michel Forst, the French Mission held two sessions of the "Group of Friends" of that mandate, on July 18 and 23. At the Human Rights Council's June session, Forst, who is French, replaced Louis Joinet, who had served as special rapporteur since 2002.

PROSPECTS FOR MANDATE RENEWAL

¶3. (SBU) While Group of Friends members agreed on the importance of ensuring the renewal of a strong mandate, several also expressed concern that achieving this may meet resistance from Egypt and the African Group as part of their general push to eliminate country-specific mandates. Noting that the current political situation in Haiti might also present difficulties, the Group stressed the importance of securing Haiti's full support before moving ahead with demarches requesting the support of other countries, including Cuba, China, and Asian Group members. Without the full support of the GoH it would be difficult to persuade those countries to support the mandate's renewal.

¶4. (SBU) Participants noted that the GoH had previously supported the renewal and had indicated that it found the

work of Joinet to be beneficial. The Chilean representative said that Joinet had worked hard to gain Haiti's trust, and that Forst's relationship with the GoH could bear on its support for mandate renewal. Mexico noted that Haiti's upcoming review in 2010 under the Universal Periodic Review would assist in renewing the mandate, because Haiti would want to show cooperation with international mechanisms.

NEW RAPPORTEUR'S IMPACT

15. (SBU) The July 23 meeting was the first between the Group of Friends and the new mandate holder. Forst also plans to meet with Joinet and the new Human Rights Council President, Nigerian Ambassador Martin Uhomoihibhi, at the end of August. A statement endorsing the new mandate from Uhomoihibhi would be especially helpful in countering opposition within the African Group, participants agreed. Forst told the Group that he plans to keep the main recommendations from Joinet's most recent report to the Council and would emphasize economic, social, and political rights.

16. (SBU) Forst demonstrated a cautious approach to his new mandate, noting that to date, he had had only one informal meeting with the GoH and that he plans to wait until the mandate is renewed next year before arranging more formal meetings. Group of Friends members disagreed with that approach, urging him to meet with the GoH sooner in order to develop better cooperation. Forst currently plans on two trips to Haiti, one in late October or early November 2008 and one in the beginning of 2009.

17. (SBU) Germany questioned Forst on how he would tie his past experience with National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to his work as mandate holder. Forst responded that he has already been in contact with Haiti's NHRI and with Haitian NGOs to strengthen NHRI involvement. Strengthening GoH institutions, including the country's NHRI, would be necessary to follow through on the Special Rapporteur's future recommendations, he noted.

18. (SBU) The July 23 meeting ended with plans for Canada, Germany, Guatemala, and France to meet with the Haitian delegation in Geneva at the end of the month to discuss the mandate. As of July 25, the Group of Friends had received word that Port-au-Prince had yet to send guidance, and as a result, that meeting was postponed. In the interim, the French Mission sent emails to other Geneva-based delegations,

including ours, urging bilateral demarches requesting GoH cooperation on the mandate. At the Group of Friends meetings, several delegations urged active U.S. participation, citing our influence in the region and our past involvement in promoting human rights in Haiti.

BACKGROUND OF THE NEW SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR

19. (SBU) Michel Forst is the Secretary General of the Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme de la Republique Francaise (French NHRI). He is a founding trustee of Frontline, the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. Forst has previously worked in the human rights section of UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, is a former Director General of Amnesty International (France) and was Secretary General of the 1998 Paris Summit for Human Rights Defenders. He has also managed the French League Against Cancer and several French NGOs. A source at OHCHR told us that while Forst comes across as reserved and very diplomatic, he has been known to be forceful when necessary in his position as SyG of the French NHRI.

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